



# **CITY OF IDAHO FALLS**

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Mayor

## **2012 State of the City**

Among the highlights of serving as Mayor of this great City is the opportunity I have to visit with people who are very committed to bettering our community. One particular group I enjoy working with is the youth. In talking with this amazing group of young people, I find that they offer a unique perspective. They don't sugarcoat things, yet the staple of these conversations has long been optimism. Occasionally, though, I'm left reeling from these talks as the students' hopes and dreams seem to take a backseat to concerns about their families' economic wellbeing.

We have all heard tales of the misery inflicted by the economic slump that's gripped the nation these past 3-1/2 years. The downturn certainly has not spared Idaho Falls, but we have plenty to be thankful for--and look forward to, as we ring in the New Year.

First and foremost, I am very pleased to report that, once again, the City of Idaho Falls is financially sound! Yes, we have had to be very frugal and make tough decisions like everyone else but because of our "pay as we go" philosophy we are able to continue to provide the services and amenities this community expects and deserves.

We're fortunate to be recognized as the hub of Eastern Idaho, with the Idaho National Laboratory, two hospitals and a thriving arts scene. Our historic downtown, the Greenbelt, museums and an abundance of locally owned restaurants and retail shops all serve as magnets for tourists and visitors from across Eastern Idaho.

The number of folks using our airport climbed slightly in 2011, while hotel stays held steady despite a drop in visitation at Yellowstone National Park. The outlook continues to be buoyed by INL's in-town campus. Although construction activity as a whole leveled off in 2011, construction started last year on the first of five buildings planned for this in-town campus, and the construction on the second is anticipated to begin this Spring. The combined value of these buildings is approximately \$55 million and they will bolster the City's standing as an energy and research hotbed. Melaleuca, one of our own homegrown businesses reached their \$1 billion mark in sales this past month, which is just another indicator the economy is on the rise.

Eastern Idaho Regional Medical Center also plays a premier role in the local economy. One of just two Level II trauma hospitals in the state, EIRMC recently completed a \$20 million renovation of its Women and Infants Center, along with the addition of a neonatal intensive care unit. We appreciate the high standard of care offered by both of our hospitals.

The City took on many projects in 2011 that not only enhanced the amenities we have but also resulted in significant cost savings. This is due to the diligence and effort of our City Division Directors and employees.

Here is a brief look at what they accomplished this past year:

With the help of Fish and Game and several generous sponsors, we finished Becker Pond, the urban fishing pond at Ryder Park. If you haven't visited, I hope you have at least seen it as you drive by on Sunnyside. The City's first dog park made its debut in 2011, and although it's only been open for just a few months, the Snake River Animal Shelter's park on West River Road has been a big hit for animal lovers. The City committed and leased 16 acres of City property that contains the dog park and is the future site of the Snake River Animal Shelter. Four soccer fields were added at the soccer complex on Old Butte Road, including two with lights for night play. The south end of the Joe Marmo/Wayne Lehto Ice Arena was rebuilt. We renovated the parking lot at the Wes Deist Aquatic Center, and the second phase of a three-phase project to renovate the roads in Tautphaus Park has been completed. And let's not forget the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of our award winning Pinecrest Golf Course.

Within our Public Works Division, the Street Department was very busy maintaining and improving our roads. Nearly 21 miles of residential streets received overlays, two miles of roadway were rebuilt and 10 miles were seal-coated, all at a cost of just over \$3 million.

We have moved forward with the North Loop transmission project, which will upgrade the City's electrical infrastructure and ensure Idaho Falls Power's ability to provide reliable and safe power as the City grows. In addition to preparing for this project, Idaho Falls Power worked to help City residents save money on their electric bills. Through its energy-efficiency programs, the City-owned utility helped its customers save approximately 5.2 million kilowatt hours, which is enough to power nearly 400 homes and resulted in an overall savings of \$322,000. They also have streamlined its warehousing and billing processes, resulting in a savings of 1,364 employee hours – more than \$140,000.

Our Municipal Services Division was able to save \$150,000 through worker's compensation and on-line payment transactions.

The Police Department worked to boost efficiency by creating three civilian positions – Evidence Custodian, Crime Scene Technician and Training Coordinator, which has saved \$95,000. As you may be aware, Chief Roos has implemented a blog that has received more than 30,000 hits, allowing greater transparency and information for the general public. Although we saw a few high-profile incidents involving law enforcement in 2011, crime was down 10 percent for the year, thanks in part to the Citizens Watch Patrol and help from the general public.

Many of you are well aware that the Citizens Watch Patrol, or CWP, has been a great asset to our community. With 22 dedicated members, the volunteer group has provided approximately 2,500 hours of service in patrolling our City streets, parks and the Greenbelt, assisting with the abandoned vehicle program and helping with many other functions. In addition, the CWP coordinated a service project that included 75 community members donating nearly 200 hours in graffiti clean-up efforts this past summer. As a result of these generous individuals, our City saved more than \$160,000!

We are fortunate to have so many volunteers in our community. In our Parks and Recreation Division alone we had over 10,000 hours volunteered, which equates to over \$80,000. Without individuals willing to serve on our numerous boards, commissions and committees, the citizens of Idaho Falls would not be able to enjoy the many intellectual and recreational activities we are able to provide.

News broke in May when voters approved the formation of the Idaho Falls Auditorium District – a significant step toward the construction of an event center. An architect has been chosen and the board is studying financing options. Though construction probably won't begin in 2012, this development is set to be an economic boon for the City and its businesses--particularly the hotels, shops and restaurants downtown.

Our downtown area has seen a flurry of construction activity this past year. Some of these additions include Idahoan Foods LLC Headquarters, Syringa Wireless, the renovation of the old Rio Theater into an interactive children's art center known as the ARTitorium, as well as the expansion of several other locally owned eateries and businesses. And, of course, we were all pleased to hear that work recently began again on the Taylor's Crossing Residence Inn, with a projected opening in late spring or early summer.

Looking forward to 2012, I am pleased to announce the Memorial Drive Master Plan and Realignment Project will kick off in July. This project includes widening the Greenbelt and eventually creating a Riverfront Plaza just north of Broadway that will serve as a spectacular gathering space with water attractions and improved pedestrian access to the downtown area. We would like to thank the Rotary Club for its many efforts in behalf of this project. With the help of the Idaho Falls Redevelopment Agency, Downtown Development Corporation and Bonneville County, the City has laid the groundwork for this project. This includes the addition of two parking lots to replace the parking that will be lost when Memorial Drive is reconfigured. This long-awaited project is yet another example of the progress that can be accomplished when we work together.

We are fortunate to be the county seat of Bonneville County, which celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 2011 by honoring its past and preparing for the future.

Collaboration is a powerful tool, and it has been a focus not only for me but for many of the other City and County leaders in our area. We've worked to boost camaraderie and coordinate economic development efforts among elected officials across the region.

The new Joint City/County Fuel Facility is a perfect example of this approach. The City teamed with Bonneville County on this project which will create significant cost savings and provide both entities with a secure source of fuel in the event of an emergency.

Collaboration also helped the City's youth. Over the last six years, more than 144 sponsors have contributed to the Mayor's Scholarship Fund, which has allowed us to award 139 scholarships to students in grades 8 through 12 totaling \$315,000. We are on track for another successful scholarship year.

The City is once again partnering with Grow Idaho Falls, the Chamber of Commerce and the State Department of Labor for the 3rd Annual Mayor's Business Day. This event is a great way to pair up those looking for work with local companies in need of qualified workers.

We have a number of exciting projects on tap in 2012.

This coming summer we will finally begin construction on the D Street Underpass by widening the road to include three lanes and improving pedestrian access. We are partnering with the State of Idaho to reconstruct the Pancheri Bridge over Interstate 15, a project that will consist of widening the road and

bridge. We will also make upgrades to the wastewater treatment plant. You will also see continued work on pedestrian crossings in the downtown area, on the Panchari Drive I-15 overpass, and at EIRMC where we will add a lighted crosswalk.

In our Parks and Recreation Division, there are plans to renovate the 19th Hole Café at Pinecrest Golf Course and provide landscaping and picnic shelters for Ryder Park. An online registration program set to debut in the coming weeks will make it easier to sign up for our Parks and Recreation programs as well as reserve Parks and Recreation facilities.

At the Idaho Falls Regional Airport, you will notice changes that will include the relocation of the luggage handling and screening equipment from the foyer. We are currently meeting with Allegiant Air officials in hopes of adding a flight to the San Francisco Bay area. And, of course, the City continues to diligently search for a carrier to provide reliable and consistent service to Boise. We are also very optimistic that Areva will move forward with construction of their uranium enrichment facility just west of town.

At our Public Library some remodeling will be taking place. Phase One of this project is the completion of the new drive-through book drop that will allow both car and pickup drop off. Phase Two will be an expansion of our meeting room area that will double the amount of space for public meetings and allow for future expansion of our children's library, which saw a 41% increase in the amount of children's books checked out last month. We are also pleased to report that downloadable e-books and e-audio are now available through the library's website.

The City's reputation as a cultural hub will be enhanced as the Museum of Idaho celebrates its 10th Anniversary with the return of its inaugural exhibit, "A T-Rex Named Sue."

To sum it up, there will be no shortage of activity across this amazing City throughout 2012.

I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the role that the City Council has played in these developments. The "pay as we go" fiscal policies the Council adheres to has left Idaho Falls on firm financial footing. The councilmembers' commitment to the City is astounding, as is the devotion of the City's Division Directors and all City employees. We're fortunate to have such hard-working people in our midst.

The citizens of this community deserve a pat on the back as well. Every year I continue to see outpourings of support for those in need; coat drives, canned food drives, anti-bullying campaigns – the list goes on and on. The caring folks of this community never cease to amaze with their consistent acts of love and kindness. I want to thank all of the wonderful organizations within our community that add so much to our quality of life here in Idaho Falls. We truly are a blessed community.

And perhaps the best part of it is the number of charity events spearheaded by the youth in our community, including those who aren't even old enough to drive.

That's another thing that has struck me while working with the youth; they don't hesitate to take action when they see a need. Even those worried about their families' economic uncertainty are quick to help others. This unselfish attitude – the personification of what I refer to as the "Spirit of Idaho Falls" – inspires and convinces me that we will emerge from this recession stronger than ever.